

The Swedish EU Presidency Said In a Tweet That the EU Ministers Adopted a New Package of Sanctions Against Iran for Alleged Human Rights Violations During The Recent Riots in the Country

IRAN NEWS

First Shipment of Exported Sedan Cars by Iran's Carmaker Saipa Arrived in Venezuela With the Export Of a First Shipment of Sedan Cars, Venezuela's Minister of Transportation Announced on His Twitter Account

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DOMESTIC

Iran Debt Claims From Iraq "Over \$5b"

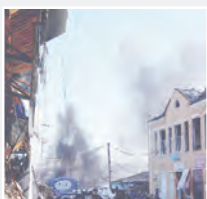


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Europe Owes Security to IRGC's Anti-Terrorism Fight

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reiterated that the European Union's plan to designate the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terror group violates the UN Charter, saying Europe enjoys security due to the elite defense force's decisive fight against terrorist groups.

Imposing sanctions on the IRGC is "a clear violation of the UN Charter," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said at a press conference on Monday.

He said Europe itself enjoys security thanks to the IRGC's anti-terror efforts in Syria and Iraq.

The European Parliament on Wednesday adopted an amendment calling on the EU and its member states to include the IRGC on their terror list. It also passed another resolution on Thursday, calling for more sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities and putting the IRGC on the EU terrorist list over alleged human rights violations during the recent riots.

Kanaani said Iran has dismissed the resolution as an "irresponsible and illogical" move. **See Page 7**

Iran Dismisses Panama's Ship Registry Cancellations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) has dismissed as insignificant a move by Panama to cancel registry of dozens of vessels allegedly linked to Iran, saying Iran will continue to rely on its own fleet of ships and tankers to transport cargo in international waters.

A PMO statement released on Sunday dismissed an announcement by Panama's Maritime Authority (AMP) earlier this week claiming that it had cancelled registry to 136 ships linked to Iran's state oil company over the last four years.

The PMO said, however, that Panama's decision to publicize the move was meant to please the United States. "We reiterate that such efforts are not only viewed as insignificant and unsubstantiated, but they have been publicized due to political pressure by the imperialist government of the United States," said the statement.

The PMO also recommended the government in Panama to consider the legal and international implications of making such statements. **See Page 7**

Tehran, Moscow Stress Implementing 25-Year Documents



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and his Russian counterpart Vyacheslav Volodin stressed the implementation of the 25-year Iran-Russia cooperation document as soon as possible.

The third meeting of the Iran-Russia Joint High Parliamentary Commission is being held when both sides have reached a common understanding of sensitivities and cooperation, Qalibaf told in a meeting with the Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation Vyacheslav Volodin.

He also expressed hope that in 2023, relations and strategic cooperation between the Iranian and Russian parliaments will be developed in the political and economic fields.

Iranian and Russian officials know that the countries are standing at an important point in bilateral and multilateral relations as well as national and regional issues.

Stressing that the strategic agreement between Iran and Russia must be taken into consideration, he said, "We must implement the 25-year Iran-Russia cooperation document as soon as possible."

Volodin, for his part, said, "The relations between Iran and Russia are on the positive track and the leaders of the two countries also enjoy good bilateral relations."

25-year Iran-Russia cooperation document is a strategic agreement that will pave the way for the development of cooperation in all fields, according to him.

"Iran and Russia have been facing sanctions and challenges for a long time, and these threats do not hinder the development of our relations," he also said, criticizing maintaining the hegemony of the United States in the world as the main goal of sanctions.

The two sides must use all efforts to create a new architecture for the world and it depends on the will of the two countries, he said.

Iran and Russia definitely support the concept of global multipolar architecture, he noted.

Following their meeting, the Iranian parliament speaker and his Russian counterpart attended a joint press conference. "Iran and Russia enjoy close economic, social, cultural, and political relations and these require us to make the most of these opportunities," Qalibaf said in this presser.

"In addition to opportunities, there are also threats that the cruel sanctions of the United States are the most important ones in our communications," he further noted.

Qalibaf also said that banking and monetary cooperation, including the activation of Iranian and Russian banks in both countries, was one of the important issues discussed in the meeting.

According to him, the other important issue discussed today was the investments in the field of oil and gas. The Chairman of the State Duma also told reporters that the sanctions imposed by the United States against Iran and Russia will make the two countries united.

The relations between Iran and Russia have really developed, and the implementation of the cooperation agreement will deepen the relations between the two countries.

Volodin arrived in Tehran on Sunday evening for a state visit.

The Iranian deputy parliament speaker Ali Nikzad welcomed Volodin and his accompanying delegation at the Mehrabad airport in the Iranian capital.

Iran Ranks Fourth Among Top Oil Suppliers in OPEC

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The International Energy Agency estimated Iran's oil production in December 2022 at 2.72 million bpd, announcing that Iran's rank upgraded to the fourth among top oil suppliers of the OPEC.

In its latest monthly report, the agency declared that the total oil production of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries in the last month of the past year stood at 29.19 million barrels per day, and the total oil production of 13 OPEC member states decreased 40k bpd in December 2022 comparing the volume in the previous month.

According to the international entity, Iran's crude oil production stood at 2.72 million bpd in December 2022, showing no change in comparison to November, but it experienced an increase of 210k bpd compared to October when the crude production stood at 2.51 million bpd.

Thus, Iran's position improved in the ranking of the top oil producers of the OPEC, and the country could surpass Kuwait which had the fourth position, the report said.

Following the U.S. illegal sanctions on Iran, the oil production level of the Islamic Republic declined remarkably, nosediving from the second to the fifth position, but the country succeeded in improving in November and December to reach the fourth rank in the OPEC. **See Page 7**

Closing of Strait of Hormuz on Majlis Agenda

TEHRAN (MNA) - A member of the Iranian Parliament says that the restriction of the traffic of European commercial ships through the Strait of Hormuz is on agenda as countermeasures against the European Parliament's anti-Iran measure.

The European Parliament adopted an amendment calling on the EU and its member states to include the IRGC in their terror list. It also passed another resolution on Thursday, calling for more sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities and putting the IRGC on the EU terrorist list over alleged human rights violations during the recent riots.

Mohammad Hassan Asfari, Vice Chairman of the Internal Affairs and Councils Commission in the Parliament, said on Monday that such actions of Europe have no other output except that they create pessimism among the Iranian people.

"We will definitely not remain silent either. Closing the Strait of Hormuz is on the agenda of the parliament," he underlined as another countermeasure against the European Parliament's call for the designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization. **See Page 7**

Iran Annual Inflation Rate Up 1.3% to 46.3% in January

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Latest figures by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) show inflation in the country continued to rise in January to reach an annual rate of 46.3%.

SCI figures published in a report by the official IRNA news agency showed that the annual consumer prices index in Iran had risen by 1.3% in the month to January 20.

The month-on-month inflation rate reported by the SCI also rose by 4.3% in January, up by 2.4% compared to the monthly rise reported in late December. Consumer prices had increased by 51.3% in January compared to January 2022, said the Iranian government statistics agency.

Iran has seen high but controlled levels of inflation since it came under a renewed wave of American sanctions in 2018. Economic closures caused by the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine on the global supply and demand of goods and services have also raised consumer prices in Iran.

An administrative government that came to office in August 2020 introduced tighter fiscal and monetary policies, helping to reduce inflation rate to nearly 40% in April last year.

However, prices have soared again after talks between Iran and world powers to revive an international deal on Iran's nuclear program stalled in September last year.

FM Commissioned to Pursue Iran's Water Share of Hiramand River

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi commissioned Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian to pursue the issue of Iran's water share of Hiramand River for Sistan-Baluchestan residents in negotiations with Afghanistan's concerned governing officials.

Addressing the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amirabdollahian in his Sunday cabinet meeting, President Raisi said that the Iranian citizens in Sistan-Baluchestan province have been faithful border keepers of Iran as of remote past.

He also referred to the problems with which the people in Sistan-Baluchestan province are entangled with for provision of fuel, commissioning his first vice president to solve that problem urgently.

President Raisi, meanwhile, referred to the noticeable progress achieved in completion of the macroscale National Information Network during the 13th government's tenure, emphasizing that the concerned officials must complete that project more rapidly.



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FM Censures Desecration of Holy Quran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has denounced desecration of the holy Quran during a recent gathering in Sweden as he criticizes European countries for allowing insults against sacred values of Muslims under the guise of freedom of expression.

"I strongly condemn desecration of the holy Quran and spreading hatred against Muslim sanctities which took place in Sweden again," Amirabdollahian wrote on Twitter on Sunday

"Injuring the feelings of Muslims of the world and Islamophobia under the pretext of the freedom of expression shouldn't become a norm in some European countries claiming to be human rights advocates," said the Iranian minister in his tweet in Farsi.

Iran Is Exporter of Vaccine Today

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said that Iran is a producer and exporter of vaccines today, adding that it does not import them.

President Raisi made the remarks at the 28th Razi Medical Research and Technology Festival which was held in Tehran.

In his remarks, the president appreciated the doctors, nurses, and those active in the health sector for providing the general public with health services to save their lives.

He also hailed researchers who, as he underlined, made the country proud of their achievements.

Also, exemplary researchers are to be hailed at the Razi Festival.

Elsewhere, the president referred to medical achievements in the country, adding that over 90 percent of medicines are being domestically manufactured.

Raisi appreciated the researchers who made them proud in the production section of the items mentioned.

Referring to Iran's achievements in the field of medicine, especially the production and export of vaccines, Raisi said: "We must maintain and improve the country's scientific authenticity and think about increasing productivity."

Referring to his meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, the Iranian president said: "During that meeting, Guterres apologized several times for not being able to stop Iran's pharmaceutical sanctions."

The President further considered the activities of 101,000 university professors in scientific and academic centers as a valuable asset for the country and said, "The existence of these loved ones should lead to the promotion of science and technology and the increase of knowledge-based and technology-based productions".

Referring to the establishment of the exhibition of scientific and technological products of the country and the visit of foreign guests to this exhibition, as well as



their praise and welcome to the achievements of Iranian experts, Raisi said, "In the recent meeting of influential women and during the visit of its participants to this exhibition, the empowerment of Iranian women received a lot of attention and was praised and admired by the visitors".

Raisi clarified, "Our country still needs the presence of experts in different sectors and also our cities should benefit from them like the capital of the provinces".

The President clarified, "Today we hear from all over the world that they are paying attention to these developments because the achievements of our specialists can also be used anywhere in the world".

He emphasized that today it is officially announced that the use of health and treatment services of the Islamic Republic of Iran is better and more economical than European countries, saying, "This is not created by words, but by action and effort, and today the people of at least 15 neighboring countries benefit from the services of our specialists, doctors and medical staff in the form of health tourism, and they are also responsible for Iran's medical achievements".

The President emphasized, "This high-quality position should be improved with extra effort and the people should benefit from its results".

In the end, Raisi said, "We hope that this honoring of researchers can be effective in motivating professors, researchers and other activists in the field of health".

Islamic Iran Experienced in Defeating Big Powers

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of the IRGC said in Parliament session behind closed doors that Europeans are not capable of encountering IRGC, adding: Islamic Iran has the experience of defeating big powers, and has today surpassed EU's will to impose sanctions.

IRGC Major General Hossein Salami reacting to the European Parliament's act against the IRGC, said, "The EU, in continuation of its historical line in this huge international sedition acted as a part of this world war against the Iranian nation. By saying the EU, I mean some European countries that are always at the scene in fueling this challenge, this war, and this crisis against the dear Iranian nation, especially Britain, France, Germany, and Dutch Land."

The IRGC commander said that a brief glance at the past 120 years from Henry Campbell, Balfour to Churchill, James Callahan, Thatcher, Cameron, Tony Blaire, and the entire British prime ministers, till today, we notice that precisely that same line has been pursued, which is campaign, war, imposing crises, and even assassinations and massacres and mass murders by imposing food scarcity and sanctions. In August 19th, (1953), coup, and even in Turkemenchay and Golestan resolutions and the Sacred Defense (against Iraqi invasion), too, the same line has been pursued.

"The other European countries that I mentioned, too, were acting likewise, you are quite familiar with the role played by France during the years of the Imposed War against the Iranian nation. The Mirage and Super Étendard warplanes and other warfare they provided for the Iraqi regime and their political and psychological propagations in favor of the Baathist Iraqi regime with their chemical arsenals, which led to swelled skins and cutting the breath of the sanctified martyrs of chemical bombardments and the war disable veterans. You can pursue the lines of political crisis generating of those European countries in imposing a global sanction against the Iranian nation.

Major General Salami also referred to the obvious footsteps of those European countries in the past months' security crisis in Iran, reiterating, "You noticed how those European countries were trying to be the main players in depriving our political system of its international legitimacy, and how they became safe havens for the fugitive rioters, whose souvenirs for the dear Iranian nation was terrorism. You saw how the French provided safe haven for the MKO terrorists, who had martyred 17,000 innocent Iranian young people," The IRGC commander added, "You saw how Europe intended to foment legitimacy crisis and threaten the country's independence, and hatch plots for disintegration of the Iranian nation's homeland. You noticed how the intelligence services of those enemies, forwarded weapons to Iran, in the course of a plot to mobilize all media and break the will of the Iranian nation by capturing the minds and hearts of the dear Iranian youth, and urging them to pour into the streets and set ablaze the achievements of the glorious and great Islamic Resolution."

FM, Venezuela Deputy FM Discuss Expansion of Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vice Foreign Minister Capaya Rodriguez and Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian have met and held talks on the developments of a mutual relationship.

Amirabdollahian underlined the need for expansion of bilateral ties, including the follow-up for the two countries' collaborations in energy, technology and high-tech as well as the enhancement of interactions.

The Venezuelan vice minister, for her part, emphasized the importance of women's role in all countries, saying that the influential women's congress in Tehran showed that the position of women in Iran is very highlighted and admirable.

The First International Congress for the Women of Influence was held in the capital Tehran on Friday, and female participants from 96 countries of five continents took part in the event.

Wives of presidents of Burkina Faso, Kyrgyzstan, and Serbia as well as wives of former presidents of Guinea and Niger, special envoy of the first lady of Nigeria, the former first lady of Sri Lanka, special envoy of the Syrian president, head of the central council of women in Turkmenistan and wife of Armenia's prime minister took part in the international congress.

Intelligence Ministry Condemns European Parliament's Act Against IRGC

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Intelligence Ministry has condemned European Parliament's move against IRGC and noted that reciprocal measures are legitimate and inalienable rights of the Islamic Republic in case actions taken against the Islamic Republic's national security.

In a statement issued, Intelligence Ministry pointed out that not only the EU does not have a clear understanding of the facts, but it has become a puppet of the US state terrorism, the Zionist regime, and anti-national and unpopular groups.

The Europeans would not have committed the unlawful actions against the IRGC, which is contrary to Article 2, paragraph 7 of the Charter of the United Nations if they reviewed the experience of similar attempts by the US.

The question that the European people should ask members of the European Parliament and western governments is what is the benefit of this so-called boycott against the largest Takfiri counterterrorism force in the West Asian region?

Western countries' lack of knowledge regarding the Iranian nation has led to instigating unrest in Iran while this is a threadbare project, it read.

The Iranian Intelligence Ministry voices its all-out support for the IRGC which is an anti-terror and anti-arrogant entity, it added.

The Intelligence Ministry reserves the right to take any retaliatory action against any move that undermines the security of the Islamic Republic, it underlined.

Iran Takes Part at Int'l Tourism Fair FITUR 2023 in Madrid

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iranian tourism activists and trade representatives took part at the 43rd international tourism show Fitur in Madrid, Spain.

FITUR is the world's largest gathering of tourism professionals, as well as the main trade expo for inbound and outbound markets in Latin America.

FITUR is the world's second largest tourist trade show. Each edition attracts around 10,000 national and international enterprises, as well as over 50,000 people scattered across the event's many days.

The event is being held in Madrid, Spain.

This year the organizers have announced a total of 8,360 exhibiting companies, an estimated attendance of 82,000 professionals from the tourism sector or associated companies, and an influx of up to 30,000 members of the general public.

Iran, Serbia Cooperate in Genetics

TEHRAN (IP) - The Director General of International Affairs of the Ministry of Health announced the cooperation between Tehran and Belgrade in the field of genetics.

Referring to his meeting with the Deputy Minister of Health of Serbia in Tehran, Mohammad Hossein Niknam, Director General of International Affairs of Iran's Ministry of Health said that Serbia is interested in expanding cooperation with Iran in the field of genetics.

Niknam also added that Serbia has good experience in health tourism and in the meeting with the Deputy Minister of Health of Serbia, it was decided to exchange experiences in this field between the two countries.

The Director General of International Affairs of the Ministry of Health also added: Serbia wants to cooperate with Iran in organ transplantation, and sending its patients to Iran.

Also, according to Niknam, Serbia wants to send professors from the country's universities to study medical sciences in Iran.

Burkina Faso Welcoming Development of Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Burkina Faso Prime Minister says that Ouagadougou welcomes any development of relations with Tehran.

Apollinaire Joachim Kyélem de Tambèla made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani in Ouagadougou.

Referring to the history of Western colonialism in the African continent, Bagheri Kani said Independence Day in African countries is the day when these countries have been able to free themselves from the captivity of European governments.

Burkina Faso's prime minister, for his part, emphasized the development of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Kyélem de Tambèla added that his country welcomes any development of relations with Iran.

The two sides also agreed in the meeting to form a joint commission between Iran and Burkina Faso.

Iran-Russia Interactions Strengthens Axis of Emerging Powers

TEHRAN (MNA) - Referring to the visit of the Russian State Duma Speaker to Iran, the Iranian ambassador to Moscow called for the continuation of interactions between Tehran and Moscow.

"The visit of the chairman of the Russian State Duma to Tehran amid the rapid international developments confirms the necessity of continuing close consultations between the two countries," Kazem Jalali wrote in a tweet.

Saying that the West has exerted all its power for the continuation of the Western-oriented world order, Jalali added that the interaction between Iran and Russia will strengthen the axis of the emerging powers.

The Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation arrived in Tehran on Sunday evening for a state visit.

A bilateral meeting between the speakers of the parliaments of Iran and Russia and holding the third meeting of the Joint High Parliamentary Commission of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation are on the agenda of the trip of the Russian parliamentary delegation in Tehran.

Iran Ramping Up Alumina Production With Chinese Help

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has started studies for the annual production of 500,000 tons of alumina from low-grade bauxite with the help of the Chinese, an official says.



"The initial phase of studies was done with the Chinese, and we are conducting the second phase of the studies," Managing Director of Iran Alumni Company (IAC) Turaj Zar'e said in remarks published on Monday.

Once the target is achieved, he said, Iran will be self-sufficient in alumina, a compound extracted from bauxite ore that is then smelted to form aluminum.

Currently, 80 percent of Iran's demand for alumina is met with imports which cost the country \$1 billion a year, he said.

According to Zar'e, the bauxite resources of the country are of low quality; hence, they are not suitable for production of alumina powder.

Iran's largest deposit of bauxite is at the edge of the desert in North Khorasan province in the country's northeast.

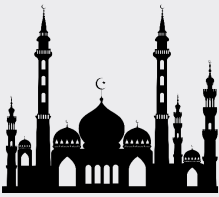
IAC, a subsidiary of state-owned mines and metal holding company Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), operates a bauxite mine and an aluminium production facility at a complex located about 10 kilometers to the northeast of Jajarm.

Bauxite is processed into alumina, which is used to produce aluminium metal. Aluminium powder is made from the metal. It is used in products ranging from paints and electronics to solar panels and fireworks.

China Nonferrous Metal Industry's Foreign Engineering and Construction Co, also known as NFC, has been cooperating with IAC and providing it with equipment.

The Chinese company's website identifies Iran as one of its markets and lists a 2005 news release identifying the Jajarm alumina plant as a "technical modification project undertaken by NFC."

The first phase of the Jajarm refinery commenced operation with a capacity to produce 40,000 tonnes per year of alumina in July 2019.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:16

17:42

05:42

07:09

1. A.L.R. These are the ayats of the Book of Wisdom.

2. Is it a matter of wonderment to men that We have sent Our inspiration to a man from among themselves?- that he should warn mankind (of their danger), and give the good news to the Believers that they have before their Lord the lofty rank of truth. (But) say the Unbelievers: "This is indeed an evident sorcerer!"

Surah 10. Jonah (1-2)

Iran Debt Claims From Iraq “Over \$5b”

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Secretary of Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters’ Union (OPEX) Hamid Hosseini says Iraq’s debt to Iran is more than \$5b and Baghdad has to pay its debts if it wants to continue trade with Iran.

Speaking to ILNA, Hosseini reacted to recent actions of the U.S. Federal Reserve for monitoring the dollar-based international exchanges by Iraq’s commercial banks and its impact on trade exchange of this country with Iran and said that currently talking about the impacts and future of trade is too soon and one should wait and see whether the Federal Reserve wants to continue this policy or not.

He added that some \$250m was per day transferred to Iraqi banks via the SWIFT system and the amount has currently fallen to some \$40m and it has caused devaluation of Iraqi currency dinar as one dollar is traded for 1600 dinars while it was traded 1450dinars before the current Federal Reserve’s decision to monitor the dollar flow in Iraqi banks.

Hosseini said that Federal Reserves’ decision may lead to dissatisfaction and anger of Iraqi people and pressure to the Iraqi government as well as creating anti-Iran climate in Iraq because dollar was transferred to Iran and for this reason the U.S. took such an action.

He admitted so far there was no monitoring for forex exchange in Iraqi banks, adding that in the past Iraq’s daily oil revenues was \$250m and the amount has considerably increased to \$350m and in the past there was actually no supervision of the forex market.

Hosseini noted that Iraq’s Central Bank has decided to control the flow of the forex market to avoid corruption and money laundering in cooperation with the U.S. Federal Reserves. He said that so far the most important Iraqi bank, which is in charge of international exchanges and exports, is TBI (Trade Bank of Iraq) whose financial management is in the hands of an American who monitored all activities of TBI, adding that it seems the U.S. wants to control all dollar-based activities in Iraq.

He reiterated that the Federal Reserve action will have no impact on Iran-Iraq trade and said that the private sector in Iraq is keen to buy Iranian products and therefore it should resolve this problem and it can pay the money for their purchases in dinar, dirham, yuan, lira or euro and if Iraq cannot pay the money, it will be definitely unable to import goods from Iran and Iran should not involve itself in this issue. He admitted that although some problems will emerge for Iran’s exports to Iraq in short time, the weakening of Turkish lira can have negative impact on exports to Iraq not only from Iran but also from other countries.

Hosseini also said that payment for export of gas and electricity is based on a defined mechanism and Iraq has to supply Iran’s required goods in exchange for gas debts and it is Iraqis’ problem to sort out this problem because Iraq is eager to increase its gas and electricity from Iran and if Baghdad does not observe its obligations, then Iran will have proper reaction.

Zimbabwe Eyeing on Boosting Economic Cooperation With Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Industry and Trade of Zimbabwe in a meeting with Iran’s Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade, announced his readiness to cooperate with Iran in automobiles manufacture.

The ninth meeting of the joint commission between Iran and Zimbabwe will be held in Tehran in the coming days, and according to the draft prepared and sent for this meeting, a number of bilateral cooperation documents will be exchanged and signed.

Iran’s Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Fatemi Amin met today (Sunday) with his Zimbabwean Counterpart Minister of Industry and Trade Hon Sekai Nzenza.

In this meeting, the parties emphasized various economic co-operations.

According to the Iran press news agency, the Minister of Industry and Trade of Zimbabwe said in this meeting: “Since the independence of Zimbabwe, we have had very long historical relations with Iran, and considering the sanctions against Zimbabwe, we can use Iran’s experiences.”

Sekai Nzenza added: “We have synergies in the field of cooperation between the two countries and we can have the necessary cooperation in the development of the road map.”

He urged Iranian traders to be flexible and even get their money in dinar because Iraq’s national currency dinar can be traded in the international markets and this can help Iran to get past this crisis in Iraq.

He then said that Iraq’s debts for gas and electricity exports are more than \$5b that had been previously reported.

Hosseini said that currently the payment system in Iraq has faced problem and it is not Iraq only which is involved in this problem and other countries trading with Iraq also are facing this problem, adding that since the U.S. Federal Reserve has reduced transfer of dollar Iraq via SWIFT, Iraq’s dinar has lost its value and demands for dollar bank note have increased and this can create problem for trade exchange with Iraq and currently the U.S. is trying to control the flow of forex in Iraq and Iraqi government should not let the U.S. meddle in trade of Iraqis.

Electrical Development of Transportation in Capital With MAPNA Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In a joint meeting of Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani and the CEO of MAPNA Group Abbas Aliabadi for broadening joint cooperation, both sides reviewed the previous approvals and MoUs of these two centers and talked about electrical development of transportation in Tehran and moving towards developing infrastructure of electrification in Tehran.

Before this meeting and visiting the plants of MAPNA Group, Tehran Mayor Zakani had visited SAIPA and Iran Khodro auto-making companies and

in meeting with the CEO of MAPNA Group, Zakani said that the base for these meetings has been creation of basic developments especially in the transportation industry of the capital and pointed to the cooperation of Tehran Municipality and MAPNA Group in the Line 11 of Tehran Metro station and opening of new horizon for production of 113 metro wagons and development of the joint co-operations in the field of IT and communications.

Zakani added that the preparation for start of executive operation of the project for construction of the Line 11 of Tehran Metro has been actually provided, and everything is going well but

regarding the supply of wagons, the issue is that the needs of national rail networks to wagons is very considerable no matter how many wagons are manufactured.

On electrification of the infrastructures in Tehran, he said that the municipality eyes 300,000 electric motorcycles for next year and these motorcycles definitely need developing infrastructures for electrification and recharge stations, adding that everybody knows that MAPNA Group is a reputed name in this field for developing the infrastructures.

Meanwhile in the meeting, the CEO of MAPNA Mr. Aliabadi emphasized renovation and electrification of rail lines wagons of Tehran and called for establishing a joint workgroup between MAPNA and Tehran Municipality to study the issue and to take fast action for operationalizing it.


In the meeting both sides also talked from shifting from using gas to electrification of vehicles in Tehran.

First Announcement

شناسه آگهی: ۱۴۴۲۶۰۵

TENDER NO.:

08-21-9540001



National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

Items	Material Description	Quantity
01	CASING, API GRADE P-110, SEAMLESS 7 IN. 35 PPF, DRIFT:5.879 IN.	500 LE

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 31,975 EURO or 9,290,337,050 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN

PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran

Tel. No.: 061 34 12 35 89 Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

Public Relations

www.shana.ir

www.nisoc.ir

<http://iets.mporg.ir>

۳۴

IRISL Top Transportation Company

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Concurrent with being selected as the top transportation company of the country, Islamic Republic of Iran Group (IRISL) was ranked 25th among the top 100 companies in the country.

According to the public relations of IRISL, in the recent rankings announced by Industrial Management Institute, IRISL could achieve the 25th place among the top 100 companies of the country while the company was ranked first among the transportation companies of Iran.

It is worth noting that this ranking has been conducted based on the financial data of the companies in the past year.

Necessity of Forming a Regulatory Committee to Monitor Bitumen Quality

By: Dr. Masoud Esfandiar, university lecturer and analyst of economic issues

The bitumen industry is one of the country’s sources of foreign exchange income in the conditions of sanctions and in line with the realization of resistance economy, knowledge-based production and job creation, whose growth and prosperity can greatly contribute to the economic progress of the country.

The total annual production capacity of Iran’s vacuum baton is 12 million tons, of which about 6 million tons are devoted to the production of fuel oil and more than 6 million to the production of bitumen, among which 4 million tons are for the production of export bitumen and 2 million tons are for Domestic consumption. In other words, out of 100% of bitumen produced in the country, 70% is for export and 30% is for domestic demand.

In terms of bitumen production and export, the Islamic Republic of Iran ranks seventh and fourth in the world, respectively, and has an eight percent share of the global bitumen market, which can be doubled based on Iran’s relative advantage in the production process. has the According to the announcement of the Office of Non-Metallic Industries of the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade, 2 million and 500 thousand tons of bitumen were exported from the country to different parts of the world during the seven months of this year.

One of the important challenges of the country’s bitumen industry is the issue of the plurality of licenses granted, which has had an impact on the process and the supply and demand of the market. In fact, quality, as the main characteristic of the country’s bitumen compared to regional competitors, is considered the winning card of entrepreneurs and activists of Iran’s bitumen industry in domestic and foreign markets. The mushrooming of bitumen producers with countless sellers has increased the bargaining power in the sales price and as a result the market has undergone successive fluctuations, which doubles the need for more monitoring of producers.

A brief look at the history of Iran’s bitumen industry shows that quality control has always been the main component of competitiveness in the market, but the increase in the number of small-scale production units has undoubtedly had an impact on the quality process of production. It seems that organizations in charge of bitumen production, including the National Standard Organization, can verify the claims of some bitumen producers in the production of high-quality products, whether they have the base for producing high-quality bitumen or not. What is being proposed by entrepreneurs and activists in the field of bitumen production these days is that the issuance of production and exploitation licenses should be in accordance with the needs of the market. It is no secret that the production and export of low-quality bitumen will take away the power of export competition from the real producers, and if the short-term and long-term strategic plans to increase the quality in the production units are damaged, the brand of Iran’s bitumen in foreign markets will also be damaged. Since the production of bitumen outside the refinery environment is costly and has no economic justification, it has caused some small producers to consider the minimum quality.

The number of producing units with bitumen standard in the country is known, and the National Standards Organization can play a key role in the entry of quality bitumen in the global markets by compiling quality indicators and necessary requirements for producers, especially export units. Another significant issue in the field of bitumen market is the competition of small-scale companies to buy vacuum bottoms in the commodity exchange, which has increased the price of raw materials for bitumen production.

On the other hand, the low price of low-quality bitumen, including Iraqi bitumen, has caused some customers to go for bitumen from other countries, or foreign customers to buy this bitumen below the price and sell it at a higher profit. It is suggested that a committee be formed by competent and major bitumen producing companies with the membership of Commodity Exchange, Ministry of Safety, Ministry of Roads and Urban Development (especially the research center of this Ministry), Refining and Broadcasting Company and National Standard Organization to organize the producing and exporting units. Bitumen should be formed to identify low-quality bitumen producing units with the necessary control and supervision.

Of course, this committee should be given the necessary power and authority so that its decisions have an executive guarantee. Also, creating a mechanism to grant the degree of quality control and certification of produced bitumen can be placed first in the agenda of this committee.

Building Collapse In Syria City Kills 16

ALEPPO (Dispatches) - A building collapsed Sunday in Syria's war-damaged second city of Aleppo, killing 16 people including children, with the search for survivors extending into the night.

Much of Aleppo was destroyed during Syria's conflict that began nearly 12 years ago and left many of the remaining structures in a decrepit state.

"The number of victims of the residential building collapse... has risen to 16 dead," said state news agency SANA. A war monitor said they were Syrians who had been displaced during the war.

Four people were rescued alive from the rubble, SANA reported, saying they were injured.



Russia Claims More Progress In Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Region



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's defense ministry said for the second straight day on Sunday that its forces were improving their positions in Ukraine's southern Zaporizhzhia region.

"During offensive operations in the direction of Zaporizhzhia, units of the Eastern Military District took up more advantageous ground and positions," the defense ministry said.

It claimed to have inflicted casualties and destroyed equipment including Ukrainian fighting vehicles, howitzers and two U.S.-made HIMARS rockets.

Reuters was not able to independently verify Russia's battlefield accounts. Ukraine on Saturday said Russia's claims of progress in Zaporizhzhia were exaggerated.

Fighting in recent weeks has centred around the town of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, where Russia's Wagner mercenaries and Ukrainian forces have been locked in a battle of attrition.

Neither side has claimed major movements on the southern front since November, when Russia pulled out of the city of Kherson. With the war now 11 months old, Ukraine has said it believes Moscow is likely to attempt a new offensive in the coming months.

Meanwhile Russia increased shelling of Ukraine's eastern regions outside the main front line in the Donbas industrial area, officials from the Zaporizhzhia and Sumy regions said.

Russia's defense ministry said a recent offensive had put its army's units in more advantageous positions along the Zaporizhzhia front line, a claim Ukrainian military officials called an exaggeration.

Reuters could not independently verify the battlefield reports.

Since an aggressive Ukrainian counteroffensive in late August, fighting has concentrated in Donbas, which includes most of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions that are partly controlled by Russia and which Moscow claims to have annexed.

After invading its neighbour on Feb. 24, Russia has attacked other parts of Ukraine's east but failed to capture them. The intensified shelling comes as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other Ukrainian officials have said Moscow would likely attempt a new offensive in the coming months.

Russian's attacks seek to overload Ukraine's defences and deter Kyiv from retaking territory, officials and analysts say. "Attempting to study our defence, the enemy has activated artillery fire," Oleksandr Starukh, governor of the Zaporizhzhia region of southeastern Ukraine, said on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia fired on the region 166 times through the day, he said, with 113 attacks aimed at populated areas, killing one civilian. Russia says it does not target civilians.

Countering Moscow's claim of recent advances, Yevhen Yerin, a military spokesperson in Zaporizhzhia, told the Ukrainian public broadcaster Suspilne, "At the moment, they have not captured anything. All their attempts have been repulsed and the enemy has suffered losses."

The Ukrainian military's General Staff said Russia continues its offensive in Zaporizhzhia, increasingly using aviation. It said 25 settlements in the region were affected by Russian artillery fire on Saturday.

Indonesian President's Approval Rating at All-Time High

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian President Joko Widodo's approval rating has hit an all-time high after the government eased COVID-19 restrictions last month, a poll showed.

Figures released by pollster Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI) showed satisfaction with the president, widely known as Jokowi, had risen consistently over recent months to reach 76.2% at the start of 2023.

"In the last three months, the president's performance has increased in (terms of) positive public perception from 62.6% in September 2022 to 76.2%. If we look at the last three months, the increase is quite significant," LSI executive director Djayadi Hanan said.



France, Germany Renew Alliance Strained Amid War in Ukraine

PARIS (Dispatches) - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was in Paris for talks with French President Emmanuel Macron, as the two leaders seek to overcome differences laid bare by the Ukraine war.

The German leader visited the French capital for a day of ceremonies marking 60 years since a landmark treaty sealed a bond between the longtime enemies that underpins today's European Union.

Germany's entire Cabinet was in Paris and 300 lawmakers from both countries met at the Sorbonne University. Both leaders will oversee two rounds of talks at the Elysee Palace, focusing on energy and economic policy as well as defense.

"Let us use our inseparable friendship ... to shape the present and future of our continent, together with our European partners," Scholz said at the ceremony at the Sorbonne.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February last year, the European peace project is at a "turning point", he said.

"Putin's imperialism will not win ... We will not allow Europe to revert to a time when violence replaced politics and our continent was torn apart by hatred and national rivalries."



Erdogan Announces Elections for May 14

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that Turkey's elections will be held on May 14 -- a month earlier than scheduled -- as the opposition still searches for a unified candidate to stand against him.

This could prove to be the most challenging election in Erdogan's two-decade rule; which has seen economic booms, giant development projects as well as disputes with neighbours, wars and a failed coup.

"I will use my authority ... (to) bring the election date forward to May 14," Erdogan said in a video from his meeting with young people in northwestern city of Bursa this weekend.

Turkey's next general election was officially due on June 18.

"This is not an early election but bringing it forward," Erdogan said during the video broadcast shared by his office.

The Turkish leader said that they had agreed on an adjustment to the timetable with its junior right-wing coalition partner to avoid disrupting the school exam schedules.

The election campaign is due to start on March 10, which would give the Turkish opposition even less time to prepare.

They have been trying for months to agree on a single candidate to challenge Erdogan at the polls.

While Turkey's high inflation and weakening currency could help their cause, internal disagreements play to Erdogan's advantage.

He has been using the government's dominance in the media to control the nation's political debate. An opposition party source told AFP this week that their joint candidate would be announced in February.

Istanbul's popular opposition mayor Ekrem Imamoglu is a favourite in opinion polls, which suggest he could beat Erdogan in a head-to-head race.

It was he who put an end to the domination of Erdogan's ruling party in the 2019 local elections.

Explosion, Gunfire Near Mayor's Office in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU (Dispatches) - A huge blast tore through buildings near the mayor's office in central Mogadishu, with gunfire erupting afterwards, police and witnesses told AFP.

"Terrorists blasted a vehicle loaded with explosives onto a perimeter wall of the Mogadishu mall which is next to the Banadir administration headquarters," police officer Abdullahi Mohamed said.

Witnesses said the explosion damaged nearby buildings and gunfire could still be heard near the mayor's office.

"There is gunfire going on inside the vicinity of the main building but we don't know what is happening inside," a witness who runs a business near the offices said.

"There are some casualties but the whole area is cordoned off and we have been asked to move away by the security forces."

Another witness, Omar Nur, said he was inside the mall when the explosion went off and "was lucky to have escaped safely."

It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack. Militants have been waging a bloody insurgency against the frail internationally backed central government for 15 years, carrying out attacks both in Somalia and neighboring countries.

The latest attack comes days after seven soldiers were killed on Friday by the Al-Qaeda-allied Al-Shabaab group in a military camp in Galdad, a

town in central Somalia about 375 kilometres (230 miles) north of the capital Mogadishu.

The U.S. military said on Saturday the attack involved more than 100 Al-Shabaab jihadists.

"The combined actions by partner forces on the ground and the collective self-defense strike is estimated to have resulted in three destroyed vehicles and approximately thirty al-Shabaab terrorists killed" the U.S. military command for Africa (AFRICOM) said in a statement.

In recent months, the Somali army and local clan militias have mounted a major offensive against the jihadist group, retaking swathes of territory in the centre of the country in an operation backed by US air strikes and an African Union force.

But despite the gains by the pro-government forces, the militants have continued to demonstrate the ability to strike back with lethal force against civilian and military targets.

Last Tuesday, Al-Shabaab launched a deadly attack on a military base in another part of central Somalia, just a day after the government claimed a "historic victory" over the jihadists.

Although forced out of Mogadishu and other main urban centres more than a decade ago, Al-Shabaab remains entrenched in parts of rural central and southern Somalia.



Ten Killed in Shooting Near Los Angeles

MONTEREY PARK (Dispatches)

- A man fatally shot 10 people and injured at least 10 others at a ballroom dance hall during a Chinese Lunar New Year celebration near Los Angeles before fleeing the scene, police said.

The shooter, still at large 12 hours after the attack in the city of Monterey Park, was believed to be an Asian man between 30 and 50 years old based on descriptions from eyewitnesses, law enforcement officials said.

"We need to get this person off the street as soon as possible," Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna told reporters at a Sunday morning news conference in Monterey Park, home to one of the largest Asian American communities in the United States.

Earlier on Sunday morning, the sheriff's department said it did not know whether the attack was racially motivated. Five of the victims were male and five were female, Luna said. Their identities have not been made public.

Luna later released images of the suspect apparently taken from surveillance camera footage showing him wearing spectacles, dressed in a dark jacket and a dark beanie hat with white stripes. The sheriff's department said it was releasing the images in an attempt to identify the suspect and that he should be considered "armed and dangerous."

Late on Sunday morning, police about 20 miles (34 km) away in Torrance, California, were using armored vehicles to surround a white cargo van that may be connected to the shooting suspect, officials said.

Luna said at a briefing on Sunday afternoon that a man resembling the suspect had been in Torrance and police believed there was a person inside the vehicle.

"We don't know their condition," he said. "Could it be our suspect? Possibly."

Officials were investigating whether an incident at another dance venue in the neighboring city of Alhambra about 20 minutes later on Saturday night was connected with the massacre in Monterey Park. At the second venue, witnesses said an Asian man walked in holding a gun that patrons were able to grab. No one was shot and the man fled, Luna said.

When police arrived at the Monterey Park ballroom, people were "pouring out of the location screaming," department captain Andrew Meyer told reporters at a news briefing.



In Mexico, Reporter Published a Story and Next Day He Was Dead

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Just after sunset on Thursday, February 10th, two men in a white Dodge Ram pickup pulled up in front of Heber Lopez Vasquez's small radio studio in southern Mexico. One man got out, walked inside and shot the 42-year-old journalist dead. Lopez's 12-year-old son Oscar, the only person with him, hid, Lopez's brother told Reuters.

Lopez was one of 13 Mexican journalists killed in 2022, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a New York-based rights group. It was the deadliest year on record for journalists in Mexico, now the most dangerous country for reporters in the world outside the war in Ukraine, where CPJ says 15 reporters were killed last year.

A day earlier, Lopez—who ran two online news sites in the southern Oaxaca state had published a story on Facebook accusing local politician Arminda Espinosa Cartas of corruption related to her re-election efforts.

As he lay dead, a nearby patrol car responded to an emergency call, intercepted the pickup and arrested the two men. One of them, it later emerged, was the brother of Espinosa, the politician in Lopez's story.

Espinosa has not been charged in connection with Lopez's killing. She did not respond to multiple requests for comment and Reuters could not find any previous comment she made about her role in corruption or on Lopez's story.

Her brother and the other man remain detained but have yet to be tried. Their lawyer did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

"I already stopped covering drug trafficking and corruption and Heber's death still scares me," said Hiram Moreno, a veteran Oaxacan journalist who was shot three times in 2019, sustaining injuries in the leg and back, after writing about drug deals by local crime groups. His assailant was never identified. "You cannot count on the government. Self-censorship is the only thing that will keep you safe."

It is a pattern of fear and intimidation playing out across Mexico, as years of violence and impunity have created what academics call "silence zones" where killing and corruption go unchecked and undocumented.

"In silence zones people don't get access to basic information to conduct their lives," said Jan-Albert Hootsen, CPJ's Mexico representative. "They don't know who to vote for because there are no corruption investigations. They don't know which areas are violent, what they can say and not say, so they stay silent."

President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's spokesman did not respond to a request for comment about attacks on the media.

Since the start of Mexico's drug war in 2006, 133 reporters have been killed for motives related to their work, CPJ determined, and another 13 for undetermined reasons. In that time Mexico has registered over 360,000 homicides.

Aggression against journalists has spread in recent years to previously less hostile areas—such as Oaxaca and Chiapas—threatening to turn more parts of Mexico into information dead zones, say rights groups like Reporters Without Borders and 10 local journalists.

Lopez was the second journalist since mid-2021 to be murdered in Salina Cruz, a Pacific port in Oaxaca. It nestles in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a skinny stretch of land connecting the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific that has become a landing spot for precursor chemicals to make fentanyl and meth, according to three security analysts and a DEA source.

Lopez's last story, one of several he wrote about Espinosa, covered the politician's alleged efforts to get a company constructing a breakwater in Salina Cruz's port to threaten workers to cast their vote for her re-election or else be fired.



The infrastructure was a part of the Interoceanic Corridor—one of Lopez Obrador's flagship development projects in southern Mexico.

Jose Ignacio Martinez, a crime reporter in the isthmus, and nine of Lopez's fellow journalists say since his murder they are more afraid to publish stories delving into the corridor project, drug trafficking and state collusion with organized crime.

One outlet Reuters spoke to, which asked not to be named for fear of reprisals, said it had done an investigation on the corridor, but did not feel safe to publish after Lopez's death.

Lopez Obrador's spokesman did not respond to a request for comment about corruption accusations related to the corridor.

In 2012 the government established the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.

Known simply as the Mechanism, the body provides journalists with protections such as panic buttons, surveillance equipment, home police watch, armed guards and relocation. Since 2017, nine Mechanism-protected reporters have been murdered, CPJ found.

Journalists and activists may request protection from the Mechanism, which evaluates their case along with a group of human rights defenders, journalists and representatives of nonprofits, as well as officials from various government agencies that make up a governing board. Not all those who request protection receive it, based on the analysis.

At present there are 1,600 people enrolled in the Mechanism, including 500 journalists.

One of those killed was Gustavo Sanchez, a journalist shot at close range in June 2021 by two motorcycle-riding hitmen. Sanchez, who had written critical articles about politicians and criminal groups, enrolled in the Mechanism for a third time after surviving an assassination attempt in 2020. Protection never arrived.

Oaxaca's prosecutor at the time said Sanchez's coverage of local elections would be a primary line of investigation into his murder. No one has been charged in the case.

Sanchez's killing triggered Mexico's human rights commission to produce a 100-page investigation into authorities' failings. Evidence "revealed omissions, delays, negligence and breach of duties by at least 15 public servants," said the report.

Enrique Irazoque, head of the Interior Ministry's department for the Defense of Human Rights, said the Mechanism accepted the findings, but highlighted the role local authorities played in the protection lag.

Fifteen people within government and civil society told Reuters the Mechanism is under-resourced given the scope of the problem. Irazoque agreed, though he noted its staff of 40 increased last year to a staff of 70. Its 2023 budget increased to around US\$28.8 million (RM12.4 million) from US\$20 million (RM86 million) in 2022.

In addition to the shortage of funding, Irazoque said that local authorities, state governments and courts need to do more, but there was a lack of political will.

"The Mechanism is absorbing all the problems, but the issues are not federal, they are local," he said in an interview with Reuters.

More convictions are what Irazoque believes are most needed, saying the lack of legal repercussions for public officials encourages corruption.

Impunity for journalist killings hovers around 89 per cent, a 2021 report from the Interior Ministry, which oversees the Mechanism, showed. Local public servants were the biggest source of violence against journalists, ahead of organized crime, the report found.



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Fitch Affirms Ukraine's Credit Rating at 'CC'

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Global ratings agency Fitch affirmed Ukraine's credit rating at 'CC', saying further foreign-currency commercial debt restructuring is likely due to the economic fallout from the Russia war and large fiscal needs in the medium term.

Ukraine suffered its sharpest economic decline in over 30 years in 2022 because of the war, with preliminary economy ministry data in early January showing a 30.4 per cent drop in gross domestic product last year.

However, the European nation's economic decline slowed in late 2022 after Russia's retreat from some southern areas of Ukraine. Its national bank in October forecast a continued gradual recovery in gross domestic product in 2023-24.



U.S. Media Rocked by Layoffs Amid Economic Gloom

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - From CNN to the Washington Post, U.S. media are facing tough times, as a series of outlets have announced layoffs this winter amid fears of an economic downturn.

Vox Media, owner of the Vox and The Verge websites as well as the landmark New York Magazine and its online platforms, announced Friday it was letting go 7 per cent of its staff.

The news follows layoffs at CNN, NBC, MSNBC, BuzzFeed and other outlets.

In a memo to staff on Friday, Vox Media CEO Jim Bankoff announced "the difficult decision to eliminate roughly seven percent of our staff roles across departments due to the challenging economic environment impacting our business and industry."

The memo, which was confirmed to AFP by Vox Media, said the affected employees were going to be notified of being let go within the next 15 minutes. That would mean some 130 out of the group's 1,900 staff.

Meghan McCarron, an award-winning journalist who spent more than nine years at Eater, a food website owned by Vox Media, tweeted Friday she was among those laid off — while 37 weeks pregnant.

"My partner and I are so excited to become parents," McCarron posted. "I can't really process the amount of uncertainty we're now facing," she added.

A Vox spokesperson told AFP they could not comment on specific cases, but that employees were offered "competitive severance packages," including extra severance pay for those with "a near-term upcoming parental leave planned."

Journalists who were laid off from other organisations in recent weeks have also taken to Twitter to express anger, dismay, or gratitude to their colleagues, while beginning to look for a new job.

"I'll be figuring out my next move. I'm a data reporter but I also write and produce," tweeted Emily Siegel, who was let go after five years as an investigative reporter at NBC. "I'd love to keep doing this work. My (direct messages) are open."

While the media layoffs were not as dramatic as those rocking tech giants such as Microsoft and Google, which announced Friday it was cutting 12,000 more jobs, they were a consequence of falling advertising revenue amid a gloomy economic climate, said Chris Roush, dean of the School of Communications at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut. "For a lot of them, they grew and expanded on the expectation that they were going to be able to grow their audience, or either readers or viewers to a certain level," Roush told AFP. "And that just hasn't happened and is unlikely to happen given what's happening in the economy."

Newsroom employment has seen a steady decline in the United States, falling from 114,000 to 85,000 journalists between 2008 and 2020, according to a 2021 study by the Pew Research Center, with local media hit especially hard.

"Journalism has been under pressure for a long time, and a number of companies seem to think this is an opportune time to reduce their labor costs — hurting both journalists and journalism," the Writers Guild of America, East said in a statement to AFP.

Yellen Warns of Financial Crisis If U.S. Defaults on Debt

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned that the United States could see a recession and "cause a global financial crisis" if it defaults on payments, as Congress heads toward a clash over raising the debt limit.

Yellen's comments to CNN in Senegal come as the US Treasury started taking "extraordinary measures" this week to avert a default as the country reached its US\$31.4 trillion (RM134.6 trillion) debt ceiling.

But such tools can only help for a limited time, likely no longer than six months, according to the Treasury. Yellen noted that the actual day on which the Treasury would no longer be able to use these measures is "quite uncertain," and could come as early as June.

If the measures were exhausted and Congress fails to raise the debt limit, the US could see a downgrading of its debt "at minimum," Yellen said.

"If that happened, our borrowing costs would increase, and every American would see that their borrowing costs would increase as well," she added. "On top of that, a failure to make payments that are due, whether it's to bondholders or to social security recipients, or to our military, would undoubtedly cause a recession in the US economy and could cause a global financial crisis," Yellen said.

This would also undermine the role of the dollar as a reserve currency used in transactions globally.

The world's biggest economy is bracing for a drawn out battle in Congress, as Republicans threaten to block the usual annual rubber stamping of a rise in the debt ceiling.

Meloni Eyes Boost in Strong Energy Ties With Algeria

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni arrived Sunday in Algeria for a low-key two-day visit as the two nations look to build up a strategic partnership and Italy works to further wean itself off Russian energy with help from the gas-rich North African country.

Algeria's state television announced Meloni's arrival with neither photos nor fanfare.

She was greeted by Prime Minister Aïmene Benabderrahmane. Like all ranking visitors, Meloni's first stop was laying a wreath at the

Monument of Martyrs. The monument on a hilltop overlooking the capital commemorates Algerians who died winning the country's independence from France in 1962.

The Italian leader also planned to visit an Italian naval ship at the port of Algiers.

Algeria has replaced Russia as Italy's No. 1 energy supplier, and Rome is looking to boost that partnership. However, topics such as naval construction, cars and start-ups were said to be on Meloni's agenda, a sign the two countries might deepen their cooperation.

Meloni was scheduled to meet Monday with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune. The two last met in November on the sidelines of a climate conference in Sharm El-Sheikh, the Egyptian resort town. A raft of agreements are then to be signed. It was unclear whether another energy deal was in the offing.

Russia's war in Ukraine, which upset global strategic and economic dynamics, gave a new and urgent dimension to ties between Algiers and Italy, long dependent on Russian energy. Other European Union nations also have scrambled to find sources of replacement for Russian energy.

Italy and Algeria want to build on then-Premier Mario Draghi's successful initiatives last year to boost Algerian energy supplies to Italy and, an Algerian diplomat said, "push beyond that."

"We want Italy to become a European hub for Algerian gas. A junction for other EU countries," Algeria's ambassador to Rome, Abdelkrim Touahria, said in an interview with Rome daily Il Messaggero, published Saturday.

An initial deal last year concluded by Draghi added 9 billion cubic meters of gas by 2023-2024 to be sent via the Trans-Mediterranean pipeline. Months later, in July, a \$4 billion agreement between the companies Eni, the Italian energy company, Occidental and Total was concluded.

Eni CEO Claudio Descalzi was to be among those in the Italian delegation accompanying Meloni

Over 90% of EU, G-7 Firms Active In Russia Despite Sanctions

LONDON (Dispatches) - Only 8.5% of EU and G-7 companies have taken steps to exit Russia or suspend their operations in the country, a new report revealed.

According to a report released by Switzerland-based St. Gallen University, despite sanction decisions against Russia, the companies continue their relations with the country as usual.

After Russia started what it called a "special military operation" in its neighbor on Feb. 24, 2022, many sectors and countries announced sanctions or suspensions for trying to exert pressure on the Russian economy. Some firms stopped their operations and deliveries in Russia, while others ended their investments or withdrew from their partnerships in Russia, even in Belarus.

The report said there were 2,405 subsidiaries owned by 1,404 EU and G-7 companies as of April 2022 and only less than 9% of them were closed or sold.

"Confirmed exits by EU and G-7 firms that had equity stakes in Russia account for 6.5% of total profit before tax. As for EU and G-7 firms with active commercial operations in Russia, with available information in the ORBIS database, 8.6% of tangible fixed assets, 8.6% of total assets, 10.4% of operating revenue, and 15.3% of total employees were found," the report stated.

The report also showed that there are more exits by foreign firms headquartered in the U.S. than those based in the EU and Japan; fewer than 18% of U.S. subsidiaries have actually divested.

"Of those EU and G-7 firms remaining in Russia, 19.5% are German, 12.4% are American owned and 7% are Japanese multinational firms," it added.

Other data released this week by Brand Finance showed that Western companies dominated the world's top brands list, and it was seen that several global brands suspended their operations in Russia, mostly in March.

Top global brands, excluding some Chinese firms, have not been active in the Russian market due to its war on Ukraine since the last February. There were 12 U.S. brands among the top 25 brands, followed by China with seven, Germany with three, South Korea, Japan and the U.K. with one.

The world's top brand, Amazon, suspended its Russian operations on March 9, 2022, announcing that it will not be accepting any new customers in Russia and Belarus.

Apple, taking second place in the top brand's list, has also suspended all official sales in Russia as of March 2, 2022, and turned off selected applications and services in the country.

Google, as the third most valuable brand, suspended some services in the country in March 2022, such as the advertising and application market. Then, Russia's communications authority blocked Google's news services in the country, accusing the service of spreading false information about the war.

Singapore, Malaysia to Sign MOC In Digital and Green Economy



DAVOS (Dispatches) - Singapore and Malaysia are set to sign a memorandum of cooperation (MOC) in digital and green economy, the first for Putrajaya amid the growth potential in both sectors, Minister of International Trade and Industry Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz said.

Digital trade is among the fastest-growing trades and will surpass physical trade by 2025, he acknowledged.

"In fact, we are hoping to conclude our first MOC in digital and green economy with our neighbour Singapore and will be witnessed by both countries' prime ministers soon," he told Bernama at the end of the World Economic Forum (WEF) 2023 here.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is scheduled to make his official first visit to the city-state at the end of January.

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had invited Anwar to visit Singapore after the latter was sworn in as Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister.

Tengku Zafrul said the discussion with Singapore on the MOC in digital trade and green economy started last year and has been presented to the Cabinet, which has given its approval for it to be concluded soon.

"In short, this is the beginning as we are also in talks with other countries," he said.

Asked if Malaysia will also take a multilateral approach in digital and green economy trade deals, the minister said: "Of course. Whatever needs to be done quickly, we do it first. It has to be done concurrently."

"We are also a member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, many other ASEAN free trade agreements and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. But the first one will be bilateral."

The MOC is following a framework of cooperation concluded by both countries in August 2022.

World Bank Chief Forecasts Global Economic Slowdown in Upcoming Year

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - In light of various crises, the World Bank believes that the global economy will be quite stagnant through 2024.

The global economy will likely enter a period of slow growth in the upcoming year due to persistent inflation and moderate investment, World Bank President David Malpass said.

"I think, it's a long-lasting slowdown... And that has to do with the persistence of inflation, the shortage of new investment that is taking place right now, so as you look one year ahead and two years ahead, it is hard to see that there will be a strong recovery," Malpass told British broadcaster Sky News.

"It looks like this period of slow growth for the world may last into 2023-24, and that's a concern," the IBRD chief added.

According to Malpass, governments should adjust their spending to make it more efficient and consider providing "time-bound and targeted" subsidies instead of open-ended ones to help target inflation and soaring energy prices.

The West has been facing a massive energy crisis and soaring inflation in light of the post-pandemic global recession exacerbated by the harsh sanctions on Russia, which in turn led to disruptions in supply chains and resulted in a further hiking of energy prices all over the world. The World Bank's most recent report issued earlier in the month, the Global Economic Prospects report, revealed some gloomy forecasts that were estimated according to past and current economic trends.

Among some of the report's notable forecasts include predictions for the growth of the eurozone, which is expected to grow at 0% in 2023, down 1.9% points from previous forecasts.



This is a clear indication that inflation and the energy crisis are having a concrete impact on the Euro economies.

For the US, the Bank forecasted US growth to drop to 0.5% in 2023, "1.9 percentage points below previous forecasts and the weakest performance outside of official recessions since 1970," according to a press release issued by the Bank on the report.

With regards to China, the report forecasts that growth is projected at 4.3% for the year 2023, which is 0.9% point below previous forecasts, according to a press release issued about the report.

The report presented by the World Bank is merely a projection of western fears as the world is gradually shifting from a unipolar world to a multipolar world.

Several Billion Dollars of Iran’s Frozen Assets Released

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran’s First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber says that several billion dollars of the frozen assets of the Islamic Republic of Iran were released during the past few days.

Stating that the whole country is full of economic capacities and opportunities, Mokhber stressed that the current exchange rate fluctuations are caused by the enemies’ media and psychological propaganda.

Referring to Iran’s vast capacities in the field of mines, the Iranian first vice president said, “With the production of one million copper cathodes, we will have 10 billion dollars of profit and income for the country. But so far, only seven percent of the copper mines in the country have been discovered, and Iran ranks sixth in terms of reserves and eighteenth in terms of production.”



Western Military Aid Girds Kyiv for Counterattacks

KYIV (Dispatches) - Billions of dollars in new Western military aid, including infantry fighting vehicles - though no German tanks - will gird Ukraine for counterattacks to foil Moscow’s efforts to revive its faltering invasion.

But Kyiv needs other weapons systems to win decisively and, while Russia is readying for a protracted war, it is unclear if defense production - in Europe at least - can keep up military aid at a high level, military analysts said.

The United States and Finland announced new packages of \$2.5 billion and 400 million euros (some \$430 million) in military aid ahead of Ramstein Air Base talks, which failed to break the deadlock on the idea of supplying German-built Leopard tanks to Ukraine.

The latest U.S. aid includes 90 Stryker armoured personnel carriers (APC) and 59 Bradley fighting vehicles with powerful canons - adding to 50 Bradleys pledged earlier this month along with French and German infantry fighting vehicles.

“It will definitely have a tactical impact on the battlefield,” Poland-based defence analyst Konrad Muzyka said by phone, pointing to the contingent of more than 100 Bradleys.

A group of nine European states, including Britain and the Baltics promised on Thursday to deliver heavy artillery, air defense, ammunition and infantry fighting vehicles and battle tanks sought by Kyiv.

The Ramstein talks were dominated by wrangling over whether Germany would approve the re-export of Leopard tanks used by NATO armies. There was no breakthrough on Friday on the issue, which is sensitive for Berlin for historical and political reasons.

Former Ukrainian defense minister Andriy Zagorodnyuk told Reuters he believed it was just a matter of time until Berlin did approve tank supplies, an assertion echoed by Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian president’s office on Telegram.

“We are getting stronger. Everything we haven’t received yet, we will receive,” Yermak said, in a clear reference to the tanks.

Zagorodnyuk said he believed infantry fighting vehicles were a clear endorsement of Kyiv’s counterattack plans, also noting the importance of large donations of ammunition.

“The expenditure rate of ammunition is huge. It’s unprecedented, probably since World War Two. We also see APCs, Bradleys and Strykers, which are of course an indicator that the allies believe in our counteroffensive,” he said.

Invaded last February, Ukraine fought back Russian forces from around its capital, its north, northeast and a swathe in the south, maintaining the battlefield initiative for much of the 11-month invasion.



Fearing that Russia could use the cold winter weather - which has slowed down fighting on the front - in order to regroup, rearm and launch a major new offensive, Ukraine has itself wanted to launch its own counterattacks.

Zagorodnyuk said he believed Russia was not able - for now - to launch anything more than localised offensives. He speculated that Russia - under the command of newly appointed General Valery Gerasimov - might be using the winter pause to redesign its war campaign to wage a long war.

“For us, that is categorically not interesting. I don’t think time works for us at all. I think we need to finish most of the effort this year,” he said.

But a senior Biden administration official said on Friday that senior officials were urging Ukraine to hold off on a major counteroffensive on Russian forces until the latest supply of U.S. weaponry is in place and training has been provided.

Berlin said earlier this month that it would send 40 Marder infantry fighting vehicles before the end of March; Paris said it would send AMX 10-RC armored combat vehicles, which are seen as tank destroyers.

Muzyka said the first combat vehicles would only arrive in March or April in an optimistic scenario. In an interview with the Economist in December, Ukraine’s top general, Valeriy Zaluzhnyi said he needed 300 tanks, 600-700 infantry fighting vehicles and 500 howitzers to help his forces push back the invaders.

“I know that I can beat this enemy. But I need resources,” he said.

German Speed Limit Could Cut More CO2 Than Previously Thought



BERLIN (Dispatches) - A new study has found that Germany could save almost three times more carbon dioxide emissions than previously thought by introducing a speed limit on its highways, increasing pressure on Berlin to reconsider the politically sensitive issue.

Data from the Federal Environment Agency (UBA) published on Thursday showed a speed limit of 120 kilometers per hour (75 miles per hour) on motorways in Germany, where there are currently no speed restrictions, could cut total CO2 emissions from passenger cars and light commercial vehicles by about 6.7 million tons a year.

In an earlier study, with a different methodology, the agency expected such limit to result in 2.6 million CO2 cuts.

The transport ministry said the study also showed that a general speed limit would lead to a shift in traffic from the motorways to secondary roads, leading to more traffic jams and more accidents in cities and on rural roads with more noise and environmental pollutants for their residents.

“Traffic flow and road safety are proven to be greatest on motorways,” a spokesperson for the ministry told Reuters, adding that the government had agreed on effective measures to achieve its climate goals, where a general speed limit was not included.

As Germany aims to become carbon neutral by 2045, the new results add to mounting pressure on the transport ministry, led by the liberal FDP party, to ramp up its CO2 cutting program for the sector that has been the slowest to cut emissions.

To meet its 2022 greenhouse reduction target, the sector’s emissions should have not exceeded 138.7 million tons of CO2-equivalents. UBA will announce in March whether the sector met that target but had cautioned in November that there was no indications it had managed to do so.

In 2021, transport in Germany emitted some 148 million tons of CO2, missing its target by around 3 million tons.

The transport ministry says its program will cut some 13 million tons in the coming years, compensating for the 2021 missed target. But environmentalists say the program does not go far enough, urging the government to introduce speed limits on its motorways, with some activists supergluing themselves to roads in Berlin and other German cities demanding such limit.

Bosnian Dairy Farm Makes Electricity From Organic Waste

KALESIJA (Dispatches) - A high-tech dairy farm is among the first in Bosnia turning biogas from animal faeces and silage into electricity, as it aims to become self-reliant at a time when high energy prices pose a risk to the subsidy-dependent agricultural sector.

The project at Spreca farm, in the north of the coal-rich Balkan country, is in line with the government’s efforts to gradually switch its energy production to renewable sources.

It is able to produce more electricity in an hour than the average household consumes in a month. Energy production started in September, operating at 50%-60% capacity due to regulatory requirements, but it will be able to produce 600 kilowatts per hour once fully operational.

It comes at a time when prices of fertilisers, food and energy have spiked following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The idea to turn the mixture of cow and chicken faeces, corn silage and other organic waste available at the farm into biogas was born almost a decade ago, farm director Said Karic said.

It is the first such project in Bosnia’s autonomous Bosniak-Croat Federation, according to Karic and project leader Mirsad Tursunovic.

“It was envisaged to crown the existing processes at the farm,” Karic said at the farm owned by the



Sarajevo Milkos dairy industry, which covers 800 hectares of its own and leased land and has capacity for 2,000 high-yielding cattle.

The scheme at the farm, which already uses automation and high tech machinery, is government-backed and funded by Sarajevo Milkos.

“This is a step towards aligning with the European standards ... and represents an economic model that can be developed to increase the economics of the business, bearing in mind that primary agriculture production is low profit,” Karic added.

Bosnia, where energy production accounts for about 20% of its GDP, is the Balkans’ sole electricity exporter, with about 60% of it produced from coal-fired plants and the rest mainly from hydropower.

Its two regions, the Bosniak-Croat Federation and the Serb Republic, have pledged to increase the share of energy produced from renewable sources by 2030 but the energy crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine has slowed those plans.

The thermal energy created during the fermentation of the biogas is also used to heat some farm buildings.

“Our long-term plan is the construction of greenhouses that would be also heated by this thermal energy,” Karic said.

South Korea to Revamp Overtime Hours in New Bill

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The South Korean government will introduce next month a new bill that will allow people to work longer overtime hours in exchange for time off, according to reports.

Reuters reported that the bill seeks to hike South Korea’s weekly work hours to 69 hours and bank overtime hours that can be exchanged for a time off. This aims to promote productivity and allow for more flexibility in the labor market.

“If you are working at ice cream factories, for example, you can work overtime seasonally, then save the hours of work and use later to go on a longer holiday,” the Ministry of Employment and Labour said in a statement quoted by Reuters.

As reported, employers and employees can make an agreement to count overtime hours:

- *by week, with 12 hours allowed
- *by month, with 52 hours allowed
- *by quarter, with 140 hours allowed
- *by half a year, with 250 hours allowed
- *a full year, with 440 hours of overtime allowed.

For counting periods of a month of longer, up to 29 hours a week of overtime would be allowed, according to the Reuters report, so employees can work up to 69 hours per week.

The government, however, has yet to announce how it can be traded to time off.

The changes to the overtime policy are “necessary,” according to business groups cited by Reuters. But the country’s opposition has expressed disagreement over the plan.

The current weekly working hours in South Korea is up to 52 hours, as stipulated in the South Korean Labour Standards Act in 2018. This includes 40 regular hours and 12 hours of overtime.

However, this weekly working hours has been under criticism by current President Yoon Suk-yeol during his campaign, where he hinted at introducing new policies to allow a more flexible working schedule, The Korea Herald reported.

Europe Owes Security to...

FROM PAGE 1

He noted that “The Europeans have been given necessary warnings,” referring to a phone call held between Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and the European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell as well as related talks held between Iran’s top diplomat and the foreign minister of Sweden, which holds the presidency of Council of the European Union.

The EU plan aims to restrict “a great anti-terror force”, he said, vowing an “appropriate” response to any “reckless” action by European countries.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kanaani touched upon the talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal, saying the absence of new rounds of talks “does not mean the absence of interaction or exchange of messages and views.” He noted that the talks serve the interests of both sides.

The spokesman, meanwhile, stressed that there are no direct talks between Tehran and Washington.

Commenting on U.S. support for the recent riots in Iran, Kanani said Washington has always adopted “non-constructive and destructive” policies toward Iran, the Islamic Republic and the Iranian nation.

He further said that the “hostile” actions of the US government, particularly the unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran, “have inflicted massive damage on Iran’s government and nation.”

He added that the “unjust” U.S. sanctions are a clear example of “crimes against humanity.”

Regarding the issue of exchange of prisoners between Iran and the U.S., Kanaani said the two sides reached agreements in this regard, but Washington has tied the issue to the revival talks of the JCPOA.

“Iran is seriously keen that necessary measures be taken so Iranian prisoners held in U.S. jails who have been arrested on baseless accusations and pretexts, including bypassing the US’ unjust sanctions imposed on the Iranian nation, can be freed as soon as possible,” Kanaani added.

Meanwhile, the EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc cannot blacklist the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps without a court ruling.

Borrell said, “It is something that cannot be decided without a court, a court decision first. You cannot say I consider you a terrorist because I don’t like you.”

He said a court in an EU member state has to issue a concrete legal condemnation before the bloc can take action against the IRGC.

Borrell made the remarks as he arrived at the venue where EU foreign ministers are due to discuss sanctions on Iran, over its alleged rights violations. The EU foreign policy chief earlier also downplayed the resolution by the European Parliament against the IRGC.

Iran Dismisses...

FROM PAGE 1

AMP’s January 17 announcement came after anti-Iran lobby groups and politicians in the US expressed their anger at reports suggesting Iran’s exports of crude oil had increased significantly in late 2022 despite American sanctions on the country.

Those anti-Iran figures claim that Panama’s flag registry has appeared repeatedly on vessels shipping Iranian oil in recent years.

The PMO said that vessels that belong to Iranian shipping companies will continue to provide import and export services to the country under Iranian flag.

Closing of Strait...

FROM PAGE 1

“If the Europeans are going to treat our armed forces and official forces like this [terrorists], we will also put other options on the table, including restricting the traffic of European commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz in the form of an urgent plan in the parliament,” Asfari noted. “It is better for the Europeans to cancel their decision before it is too late.”

The majority of Iranian lawmakers also censured the European Parliament’s “wrong” decision, which they said was politically motivated and based on false information and misjudgments.

It is clear that Iran’s enemies, having failed to spread insecurity inside the country, now resort to such baseless measures in an attempt to exert political and media pressure on the Islamic Republic, the MPs said.

Iran Ranks...

FROM PAGE 1

Kuwait produced 2.68 million bpd in November and 2.66 million bpd in December, while it produced 2.8 million bpd in October.

Saudi Arabia produced 10.48 million bpd in December to stand as the first OPEC oil producer, followed by Iraq and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with 4.45 million bpd and 3.23 million bpd respectively.

Perez Holds on to Claim Abu Dhabi Title

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - Victor Perez endured A nail-biting drama over the closing stretch of the Abu Dhabi Championship, before edging a one-shot win. The 30-year-old Frenchman holed out his bunker shot on the par-3 17th hole in remarkable fashion to get to 19-under, before visiting the fairway bunker and making a bogey on the par-5 18th hole at Yas Links Abu Dhabi. Perez finally closed with a six-under par 66 for an overall total of 18-under par 270.

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Yule Beats Ryding for Kitzbuehel Slalom Victory

KITZBUHEL (Dispatches) - Switzerland's Daniel Yule Kheld his nerve for a dramatic win to take the men's World Cup slalom in Kitzbuehel for a second time in his career. Yule, born in foothills of the Swiss Alps to Scottish parents, had clocked the seventh fastest time in the first leg down a super-icy Ganslern slope in the Austrian resort. The 29-year-old, who won in Kitzbuehel in 2020, was third fastest on the second leg for a winning aggregate of 1min 44.63sec.

Tsitsipas Makes Australian Open Quarters

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Stefanos Tsitsipas took inspiration from the watching Rod Laver to stay calm in the face of an onslaught and battle into a third consecutive Australian Open quarter-final.

The Greek third seed extended his win streak this year to eight matches with a 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-3 triumph over Italian 15th seed Jannik Sinner on Rod Laver Arena as the clock ticked over four hours.

Victory set up a clash against surprise package Jiri Lehecka for a place in the semis after the 21-year-old stunned sixth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/3).

That upset put the Czech into the last eight at a Grand Slam for the first time after being knocked out in the first round at all four majors last year.

"I just stayed really calm, just like Mr Rod Laver used to do in his day," said Tsitsipas as the crowd roared their approval and Australian legend Laver saluted the Greek player from the stands.

"It was a long match, I felt like I spent an entire century on this court playing tennis.

"What a great night. That was superb, 'a ripper' as they say here. I'm really excited to be sharing moments like this on the court, especially in Australia.

"I'm trying to do my best out here, it's not easy. I had an unbelievable opponent on the other side of the court today," added Tsitsipas, the highest remaining men's seed.

Tsitsipas, who lost in the 2022 semi-finals to eventual runner-up Daniil Medvedev, is playing for a double prize -- not only a maiden major title but also the number one ranking.

That will be his if he lifts the trophy in Melbourne.

Novak Djokovic, who he cannot meet before the final, can also become the world's top-ranked player should he be crowned for a 10th time in Melbourne.

Tsitsipas led Sinner 4-1 in their head-to-heads leading into the match, including victory in the Melbourne quarter-finals last year, but it proved to be a tough test for the Greek.

He stated his intent by breaking Sinner in the first game thanks to a baseline error from the Italian.

Tsitsipas then saved four break points in the next game to keep the advantage and went on to seal the first set.

Azarenka Fights

Her Way Into Quarters

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka reached the quarter-finals at 2:17 am on Monday after winning a bruising late-night encounter against China's Zhu Lin.

The 24th-seeded Belarusian won 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 and will play Jessica Pegula of the United States, the highest remaining women's seed left in the draw at three.

Tournament organisers were widely criticised days ago when Andy Murray and home player Thanasi Kokkinakis did battle until 4:05 am.

The match between Azarenka and unseeded Zhu started late at Rod Laver Arena because the preceding encounter between Stefanos Tsitsipas and Jannik Sinner went to five sets.

It turned out to be a gruelling clash, which started late on Sunday and concluded in the early hours of Monday, in front of what was a nearly empty stadium by that time.

"It was two hours and 40 minutes of complete pressure," the 33-year-old Azarenka said afterwards.

Asked what time she would get to bed, she replied: "I don't even know what time it is.

"Probably I'll be up till 6:00 am, then mask on and sleep during the day."

After winning a set each, Zhu and Azarenka went into the deciding third and proceeded to exchange breaks to 3-3.

Both players were smacking some thunderous ground strokes and the 28-year-old Zhu finally held serve for 4-3 to put her within sight of the last eight.

The 2012 and 2013 Australian Open champion Azarenka then held to level at 4-4, and broke her opponent for 5-4 when Zhu fired her return into the net.

Azarenka sensed victory and dug herself out of a hole when facing two break points.

She sealed the deal on the first match point with a searing two-handed crosscourt backhand.



It went with serve in the second until the Greek pounced for 5-4 with a sizzling cross-court forehand then served it out in 46 minutes to take control.

But Sinner came storming back, with Tsitsipas saving six break points before finally succumbing to fall 3-1 behind and lose the set.

Sinner was fired up and constantly threatening, converting his second break point when Tsitsipas sent a forehand wide to move 2-1 clear in the fourth set.

The Greek star had no answers and it went to a fifth set.

Sinner saved three break points in the fourth game, but when Tsitsipas worked three more on his opponent's next service game, he made no mistake.

The third seed moved 4-2 clear and ultimately got over the line for the win.

Lehecka now stands in his way after the Czech defeated a top-10 player for the first time.

"Honestly, it feels amazing," said Lehecka, who has climbed 70 places in the rankings over the past year to 71.

"After losing in the first round last year, if someone had told me before the tournament that I would be playing like this, I wouldn't have believed them."

Before his exploits at Melbourne Park, Lehecka's biggest splash came last February in Rotterdam, where he advanced to the semi-finals -- before being beaten by Tsitsipas.

Mowinckel

Claims

Super-G Lead



CORTINA D'AMPEZZO (Dispatches)

C- Ragnhild Mowinckel took top spot in the women's World Cup super-G standings after claiming victory at Cortina d'Ampezzo on Sunday, while Mikaela Shiffrin was again left waiting to break the women's all-time wins record.

Norway's Mowinckel won her first race of the season and the third of her World Cup career with a time of one minute, 23.22 seconds, 0.30sec ahead of Austrian Cornelia Huetter.

Marta Bassino took the final spot on the podium on home snow, finishing 0.47sec off the pace after having led early on, with Lara Gut-Behrami in fourth.

Olympic champion Gut-Behrami trails Mowinckel by 30 points in the discipline standings. "I'm super, super happy with my skiing... I was genuinely surprised when I saw the time at the finish because I know it's a tight race so I was super excited," said Mowinckel.

American star Shiffrin finished 0.62sec back in seventh, the third time in consecutive days that she has missed out on a record-breaking 83rd World Cup win.

Shiffrin will have two more chances in Italy to break a tie with now-retired Lindsey Vonn as the female skiers with most wins on the elite alpine circuit.

Guardiola Hails Incredible Hat-Trick Hero Haaland



LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola Lhit back at suggestions Erling Haaland would not adapt to Manchester City's style of play after the Norwegian scored his fourth hat-trick of the season in a 3-0 win over Wolves.

The 22-year-old now has 25 Premier League goals in just 19 appearances and 31 in total just halfway through his first season with the English champions.

"The numbers are incredible," said Guardiola. "He lives 24 hours for his profession, job, passion, love.

"He's not stressed much when it's going well or going bad. He is stable."

Haaland's remarkable scoring rate has slowed slightly in recent weeks and with City trailing Arsenal in the title race, questions had been asked over whether Guardiola's men function better as a team without a natural striker.

City have won the title for the past two years while largely playing without a recognised number nine.

"When he played and scored, I don't know many goals, he is the solution and everything of the team and when he does not score, he is the problem in our team," added Guardiola.

"We know his quality. We know each other. He is not a player to be dropped. We can't play the false nine with him. You have to adapt some movements with him and we are doing quite well."

A comfortable win was just what Guardiola was looking for after he called out a lack of hunger and desire from his squad to retain the title after coming from behind to beat Tottenham 4-2 on Thursday.

"We talk a little bit these days about what we think we miss," said Guardiola.

"It's just one game. We will see in the future.

"Our football was really, really good. Today we improved. That was just today. We will see what happens in the next games."

Ronaldo Starts With A Win After Lucrative Saudi Move

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Cristiano Ronaldo made a winning start to life in the Saudi Pro League as he led Al Nassr to a 1-0 victory over Ettifaq in his first match since becoming the best paid footballer in history.

The Portuguese superstar took time to get going but there were promising signs for Al Nassr, who are eyeing domestic and continental silverware after the 37-year-old moved for deals totalling more than 400 million euros.

However, Ronaldo's league debut had an anticlimactic feel in front of 22,862 fans after he scored twice in this week's lively 5-4 exhibition defeat to Lionel Messi's Paris Saint-Germain.

Ronaldo, leading out Al Nassr as captain, made a low-key start in the first half, twice losing the ball with attempted trickery as his team-mates struggled to get him on the ball.

Ronaldo's early shot from the edge of the box was deflected over, and he nearly met Abdulmajeed Al Sulaiheem's cross that was headed in by Anderson Talisca for the opener on 31 minutes.

Shortly afterwards Ronaldo, met by shouts of "Siu!" every time he touched ball, blazed over with a free kick from an inviting position just outside the penalty area.

Al Nassr's front three began to click in the second half and Ronaldo set up Pity Martinez and Talisca -- after some trademark stepovers -- for close chances in quick succession.

A swing and a miss at a bicycle kick showed Ronaldo was warming to his task, and he then attempted a shot from a nearly impossible angle after a dribble into the box.

But there was to be no goal for Ronaldo, watched by his girlfriend Georgina Rodriguez, in a win that kept Al Nassr on top of the Saudi Pro League.

Ronaldo arrived in oil-rich Saudi Arabia in early January but his debut was delayed while he served a two-match ban for knocking a mobile phone out of a fan's hand while at Manchester United.



Arsenal Defeat Man Utd 3-2 In a Thriller

LONDON (Dispatches) - Eddie Nketiah's last minute strike earned Arsenal a thrilling 3-2 win over Manchester United to move five points clear at the top of the Premier League on Sunday after Erling Haaland's hat-trick fired Manchester City to a 3-0 victory over Wolves.

The Gunners remain on course for a first title in 19 years with a game in hand over City also to come.

United went in front at the Emirates after Marcus Rashford's thunderous strike opened the scoring with his ninth goal since the World Cup break.

Arsenal levelled within seven minutes as Nketiah's powerful header rounded off a brilliant team move.

Bukayo Saka's long-range effort that arrowed into the bottom corner put the home side in front early in the second half.

This time United bounced straight back when Lisandro Martinez, who had been a target for Arsenal before arriving at Old Trafford in July, headed in a loose ball from a corner.

Erik ten Hag's men were penned inside their own box for much of the final quarter as the post denied Saka a second and David de Gea saved from Nketiah.

Arsenal's pressure finally got its reward when Nketiah flicked home Martin Odegaard's shot and the goal survived a VAR check for offside.

"Emotional, a lot of passion, a lot of quality. It doesn't get much better than that," said Arteta.

"To come here against this team and play the way we played. The second half especially, the performance was incredible."

A first defeat in 11 games realistically ends any hope of United's first title in a decade as they slip 11 points behind Arsenal in fourth, having played a game more.

